
Stream Gage Oversight Work Group

Subcommittee of the Governor's Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee
<http://dnrc.mt.gov/stream-gage-oversight>

MEETING #7 SUMMARY NOTES

DATE: February 17, 2021

TIME: 10:00 – 12:30

LOCATION: ZOOM Webinar

Summary

This was meeting #7 of the Stream Gage Oversight Work Group. This meeting focused on stream gage networks that are not operated by the USGS. DNRC hydrologist Matt Norbert gave a presentation on DNRC's Stream Gage Program, and Supervisory Hydrologist Seth Makepeace gave a presentation on the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Steam Measurement Program

Action Items

- Paul will post approved summary notes from meeting #6 to web site.
- Stephen and Paul will keep working on work plan items.
- Working Group members should start thinking potential recommendations.

Member Present:

- Stephen Begley – Fish Wildlife & Parks – Co-Chair
- Paul Azevedo – Dept of Natural Resources – Co-Chair
- John Peterson – Dept of Ag
- Darrin Kron – Dept of Environmental Quality
- Wayne Johnston – Dept of Commerce

Attendees: Ethan Kunard – MWCC, Laura Nowlin- Musselshell Watershed Coalition, Seth Makepeace – CSKT, Morgan Case-MT Trout Unlimited, John Kilpatrick - USGS, Brian Loving – USGS, Dave Callery – USFS, Matt Norberg-DNRC.

Review of the November 4, 2020 meeting

- Paul provided a recap of November 4th meeting.
- Work Group approved November meeting summary.

Status of Work Plan Activities

- Paul provided a progress report on Work Plan objectives and tasks. Link [HERE](#)

Stream Gage Networks Separate from USGS

- Objective 4 of Work Plan is to identify cost effective and reasonable alternatives to stream gages, including gages that are not part of the USGS stream gage network. DNRC hydrologist Matt Norbert gave a presentation on DNRC's Stream Gage Program, and Supervisory Hydrologist Seth Makepeace gave a presentation on the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Steam Measurement Program

- DNRC Stream Gage Network – Matt Norberg, DNRC Link [HERE](#)
- CSKT Stream Gage Network – Seth Makepeace, CSKT Link [HERE](#)

Working Draft of Communications Plan - Paul

- Objective 1 – Task 1 of Work Plan is to develop a rapid notification process. The goal is to minimize network disruptions by exchanging information far enough in advance that it can be acted on
 - Stephen and Paul have met twice with USGS to discuss a workable notification plan. Concept was shared with some of the stakeholders on January 15th.
 - Working draft of the plan for Work Group members to review was posted our Teams site on Feb 4th.
 - Paul and Stephen are looking for feedback on working draft. Still some items to be worked out, but are we headed in the right direction? Do members have suggestions for improvement or is there something we overlooked?
 - Mike Honeycutt – Plan hits the main points and addresses the main concern that led us to this point. The devil will be in the details. Having someone on-point to receive information from USGS and then passing it on to others.
 - John Peterson – Is the Stream Gage Work Group going to be around after 2023? DNRC (Paul) is point of contact now, but what happens in the future?
 - Mike Honeycutt – A common theme we have heard in all the presentations and in the Working Group’s own discussion is the ambiguity with ongoing funding. The Working Group has collected great technical information, but how does that information drive decisions and how to those decisions translate to economics? Mike brought up an example about securing funding for more CWD testing. People can easily translate the economic benefits of more testing. Need to find economic data to demonstrate why ongoing funding for stream gages is a good thing.

Federal and State Funding Outlook

- Brian Loving (USGS WY-MT Science Center) provided an outlook for Federal funding in fiscal year 2022 (starts October 1, 2021.). Brian is replacing Kirk Miller who will retire in a few weeks.
 - USGS stream gages are supported by two sources of federal funds.
 - Cooperative Matching Funds – Federal funds USGS can use to match funds provided by Cooperators (federal, state, tribal, local entities).
 - Federal Priority Stream Gage Funds – Federal funds USGS can use to cover 100% of costs. Gages receiving federal priority funds must meet certain criteria.
 - Congressional appropriations for USGS stream gages have been flat for the last several years. USGS expects that FY22 funding levels will be the same as FY21. Congressional appropriations do not keep up with inflationary pressures so USGS must pass the increase onto Cooperators.
 - USGS is in the process of setting gages prices for FY22. Cooperators can expect an increase of 1% to 1½%.
 - Data loggers and transmitters on all USGS stream gages linked to GOES satellites must be updated by 2026. Each data logger and transmitter costs about \$3,000. USGS has replaced about 20% of them so far. Cooperators may see a cost increase associated with the change out.
 - Part of Brian’s job is to focus on identifying operational efficiencies in the WY-MT Science Center.

- State –
 - Paul Azevedo – DNRC budget will cover current contract agreement with USGS which expires in June 2021. Comfortable predicting that DNRC will be able sign a new contract to cover gage funding from July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.
 - Stephen Begley – FWP funding comes from licenses dollars. FWP can maintain commitment for gages they currently fund in the current biennium. FWP will have to reexamine commitments at the start of the next biennium.
 - Darrin Kron – DEQ currently funds one gage on the Smith River. Will maintain funding for that gage through the Summer of 2021. DEQ funds project-specific gages. Primarily water quality projects. DEQ’s funding for gages stops when the project is complete.

Potential for changes in Work Group membership.

- This item was intended to see if there would be any known changes in Working Group membership under the new administration. This item was not addressed do to lack of time.

Public Comment

- Morgan Case (Trout Unlimited) – Had a question for Darrin Kron regarding location of DEQ funded gage on the Smith River.
 - Darrin – Gage is located on the lower Smith at Eden Bridge.

Wrap Up

- It takes a lot of money to operate gages. Federal funding for stream gages has remained flat. State agency budgets have limited ability to keep up with increasing costs. Local groups have difficulty raising funds to support gages in their watershed.
- Working Group needs to start thinking about recommendations to shore up funding and limit disruptions that occur when gages shut down. Also identify opportunities to expand the funding base.

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Next meeting

- Date and time will be determined by Doodle Poll. Legislative schedule may dictate meeting data.